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Emotional Intelligence, Coping Strategies, and Attachment Style in College Students

Caitlin Kelly and Thomas A. Martin

Abstract

This study investigated the relationships between emotional intelligence, coping strategies, and attachment style in college students. Results supported the hypotheses, yielding significant positive correlations between emotional intelligence and positive coping strategies, negative correlations of emotional intelligence with negative coping strategies, and positive correlations of secure attachment style with level of emotional intelligence and positive coping strategies. Fostering emotional intelligence may promote healthier and more positive coping strategies.

Introduction

- ❖ Emotional intelligence is the emotional skills individuals have learned through experience.
- ❖ Mikolajczak (2009) showed that trait emotional intelligence correlated positively with adaptive coping strategies and correlated negatively with maladaptive coping strategies.
- ❖ Coping is “the constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage internal or external taxing demands” (Holinka, 2015, p. 301).
- ❖ Carver (2013) divides coping strategies into fifteen categories: positive reinterpretation and growth, mental disengagement, focus on and venting of emotions, use of instrumental social support, active coping, denial, religious coping, humor, behavioral disengagement, restraint, use of emotional social support, substance use, acceptance, suppression of competing activities, and planning.
- ❖ Pashang and Singh (2008) have shown that individuals who exhibit lower levels of emotional intelligence use coping strategies such as distraction, religion, denial, or social support more than those with higher levels of emotional intelligence.
- ❖ Fullam (2002) has found that secure attachment is related to relationships that are emotionally close and trusting, as well as better coping skills and higher levels of emotional intelligence.

Hypotheses

- ❖ Positive correlations of emotional intelligence with positive coping strategies, and negative correlations with negative coping strategies.
- ❖ Positive correlations between close attachment style, emotional intelligence, and positive coping strategies.

Method

- ❖ Participants were 186 undergraduates in psychology courses who received extra credit for completing a survey.
- ❖ Data were collected with a Qualtrics survey containing the 33-item Emotional Intelligence Scale (Schutte, et al., 1998), 60-item COPE Inventory (Carver, 2013), and 18-item Revised Adult Attachment Scale-Close Relationships Version (Collins, 1996).
- ❖ A link to the survey was emailed to participants, who completed it at a time and in a place of their choice.

Results

- ❖ Alpha coefficients for all scales ranged from good to excellent.
- ❖ Emotional intelligence and attachment style showed significant positive and negative correlations in the expected directions.
- ❖ Emotional intelligence and coping skills correlated extensively, in the anticipated directions, with the exceptions of mental disengagement, venting emotions, and humor.
- ❖ Close attachment style correlated positively with several socially oriented coping strategies, but negatively as well with strategies such as denial and substance use.
- ❖ Other attachment styles also yielded a number of significant correlations in both the positive and negative directions.

Table 1
Alpha coefficients and correlations

	α	EIS	RAAS		
			Close	Dependent	Anxious
Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS)	.90		.37**	.25**	-.29**
Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS)					
Close attachment	.80	.37**			
Dependent attachment	.79	.25**	.58**		
Anxious attachment	.87	-.29**	-.27**	-.61**	
COPE					
Positive Reinterpretation and Growth	.72	.59**	.14	.19**	-.26**
Mental Disengagement	.73	.04	.01	-.23**	.32**
Focus on and Venting of Emotions	.74	-.05	.16*	-.04	.28**
Instrumental Social Support	.71	.30**	.29**	.21**	-.04
Active Coping	.73	.45**	.07	.12	-.23**
Denial	.74	-.28**	-.24**	-.29**	.31**
Religious Coping	.74	.28**	.12	.11	-.08
Humor	.74	-.08	-.06	-.05	.01
Behavioral Disengagement	.74	-.41**	-.17*	-.27**	.40**
Restraint	.72	.25**	.06	.04	-.05
Emotional Social Support	.73	.22**	.38**	.34**	-.05
Substance Use	.75	-.22**	-.28**	-.25**	.26**
Acceptance	.72	.24**	.09	.02	.03
Suppression of Competing Activities	.72	.30**	.01	-.03	-.07
Planning	.73	.52**	.13	.18*	-.28**

Note. N = 186; *p < .05; **p < .01